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GOLD IN CALIFORNIA

History of Production. The gold placers of San Francisquito, Placerita, Castaic, Santa Feliciana and San Gabriel Canyons, Los Angeles County were worked prior to 1848 by Spanish Californians. These early attempts at gold washing were forgotten in the rush started by Marshall's discovery of gold at Coloma, El Dorado County, on January 24, 1848. The first shipment of California gold dust to a U.S. Mint arrived in Philadelphia in 1843.

The rich surface placers yielded gold at a rapid rate and the all-time high in annual output was reached in 1852 when 3,932,631 fine ounces were produced. The annual production receded from that figure during the ensuing 14 years owing to the depletion of the richest placers.

Gold-bearing quartz was discovered in Nevada County in 1852. The increased production from quartz ores during the middle sixties offset the decline in placer production, and stabilized the annual output for the next two decades.

In 1883 placer mining was severely curtailed by the Sawyer Decision against hydraulic mining, which prohibited the dumping of debris in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and their tributaries.

The major part of the gold produced in this state from 1884 to 1910 came from the underground lode mines. Connected-bucket dredges began operating in the middle nineties and by 1905 had become important factors in the annual gold production. By 1910 production from these dredges represented about 40 percent of the annual output.

The inflationary period during and following World War I had an adverse economic effect on gold mining. "Boom" periods are always unfavorable for gold mining, as labor and materials become expensive and the fixed price for gold prevents any in-

crease in income to cover higher costs of mine operation. For this reason gold production dropped steadily from 1915 to 1929, reaching in 1929 the lowest point in production since 1848.

Operating costs were reduced during the depression years of the early 1930's. This reduction, combined with an increase in the price of gold from \$20.67 to \$35.00 per ounce in 1934, greatly stimulated the gold mining industry. The momentum of these favorable economic conditions carried the gold mining industry to new heights. During 1940 production totalled 1,455,671 fine ounces, the highest since 1862.

Dragline dredging which began in 1933 reached a maximum production in 1941. This climb in production was halted by the era of high wages and scarcity of materials and equipment which set in with the beginning of World War II in 1941. Further restrictions were placed on the few operators able to continue work with the promulgation of



Placer miner at work on claim in the Mother Lode. Much placer mining is done today in California by solitary miners who rework mined areas.